Lincoln County Questions "Freedom of Choice"

STAR CITY, June 4 - Fifty people from Star City and vicinity conducted a mass meeting tonight to exchange opinions and experiences concerning the "freedom of choice" plan of desegregation of this area's public schools.

The Lincoln County Civic Club called the meeting, but many who were not club members attended and spoke. Reverend Ben Griffin of SNCC moderated the gathering at the New Macedonia Church.

"There really isn't a choice between the Negro and white school," reported several students who were present. "The Negro school in question is not accredited, while the white school is." Many parents reported that their children had been discouraged from registering to attend the white schools.

Nearly everyone at the meeting expressed the feeling that they had not been informed about the school board's desegregation plans. Many questions could not be answered because of lack of information.

Continued on Page 3
"The purpose of a community center or a freedom center," said Miss Nancy Stoller, "is to provide a place where people can gather for recreational activities, meetings and discussions." Miss Stoller is acting as coordinator for the 50 summer volunteers SNCC is sponsoring to aid in the freedom centers.

EVERYONE IS INVITED

These centers will be open to people of all ages, children and adults. Miss Stoller stressed that the people who attend the centers will plan the programs throughout the year. "Everyone who lives in traveling distance of a center is welcome to visit," she said, "and to join in the activities."

VOLUNTEERS AID IN PROGRAMS

SNCC is sponsoring several volunteers for each center. These volunteers have a variety of skills to help in starting programs and in providing supplies. "Their main purpose," said Miss Stoller, "is to assist communities in getting what they want."

All the community centers will include libraries. Other activities requested in some towns are tutoring in school subjects for students who desire help, and arts and crafts.

Communities or organizations who would like to have a freedom center in their area are urged to contact their local freedom worker or write Miss Nancy Stoller at the SNCC office, 700 West 9th Street, Little Rock.

THE COMMUNITY PLANS THE PROGRAMS

GOULD

Mrs. Carie Dilworth has donated a building in Gould to be used as a community center. The two-story wooden frame building is in the process of being repaired by SNCC volunteers and Gould residents. This center will probably also serve as a place for several summer volunteers to live.

PINE BLUFF

Members of the Pine Bluff Movement and SNCC are trying to open a freedom center in Pine Bluff. Volunteers in this area will probably need housing in the community.

FORREST CITY

The Forrest City Youth Club is sponsoring a freedom center in Forrest City. The Youth Club, organized by Mrs. Kathryn Clay, holds its meetings in Clay's Chapel.

An old fire-damaged Funeral Home was donated for use as the freedom center. Volunteers are repairing the roof and walls and painting parts of the interior. This freedom center will probably house several volunteers.

WEST HELENA

The West Side Voters League in West Helena is sponsoring a freedom center to be operated in the Greater First Baptist Church in West Helena. They are also negotiating for a large tract of land with a swimming pool nearby.

SOUTHLAND

The Southland Voters League is sponsoring a second Phillips County freedom center. This center will probably be operated in the Springdale Baptist Church in Southland.

Both Phillips County centers will sponsor sessions in Negro history, literacy, and other subjects along with extensive recreational programs.
Star City Meeting
Continued from Page 1

Two men and two women volunteered to go to the school board to try to get some answers. The committee of four said they would welcome anyone who wished to join them.

Everyone decided to record their complaints about the school board's handling of the desegregation plan. The complaint will be in the form of a letter to the U.S. Office of Education listing particular grievances. A copy will be sent to the school board.

Specific complaints were voiced by a number of people. Students complained that they had been told by their high school principal that they would be hung if they were caught at the Negro school, but that if they stayed at the Negro school they would have parties and socials.

They were told, the students said, that there was no room at the white school. The Negro school, they said, was not only seriously overcrowded but was also falling apart.

One man on the committee to seek information remarked, "We all have to put our shoulders to the wheel. The time for the wheel to turn is now."

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PINE BLUFF POOLS
INTEGRATED NOW

PINE BLUFF, Ark.
Eight local Negro youths swam in the Oakland Park Public Pool for the first time here on May 31.

The city of Pine Bluff recently announced the opening of the city pools on an integrated basis. This was the first time Negroes have been allowed to swim in the "white" Oakland Park Pool.

The eight high school aged Negroes reported no incidents more serious than insults and water splashing from the approximately fifty whites who were present. A small group of white onlookers gathered but none of the whites in the pool was seen to leave.

The Pine Bluff Police Department was on hand to control any problems which might have developed.

Previously, separate facilities were maintained for whites and Negroes. Both city swimming pools were closed last year when an attempt was made to integrate Oakland Pool.

Summer Plans Announced

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Summer plans for Arkansas were announced here by the SNCC office. These will include a voter registration drive, community centers, publicity discrimination and segregation, and political organizing.

According to Jim Jones, SNCC State Project Director, about 50 Negro and white volunteers will be added to the summer staff.

The volunteers will aid projects operating out of Jefferson, Phillips, Lincoln, and Desha Counties.

STATISTICS AVAILABLE

"The General Condition of the Arkansas Negro," a statistical survey, is available from your local SNCC office.
The hospital was financially supported through the efforts of the local Negro doctors, who not only practiced there but also contributed financially. The hospital was kept open as long as they could, but eventually the financial strain became too much, and the hospital had to be closed.

At this time, there were 27 counties in Arkansas that had not participated in registration for Negroes. The county clerk of each county was expected to register Negroes for one year, in the order in which they presented themselves. The number of Negroes who registered was still small, but the effort continued.

The petition for the integration of the schools was presented to the Board of Education, but it was rejected on the grounds that it was not in the best interest of the public. The Board maintained that the Negro children were not ready for school and that it was better to keep them at home.

In conclusion, the integration of the schools and the hospital was a slow and difficult process, but it was a process that was necessary for the advancement of the Negro community. The efforts of the local Negro doctors and the support of the community were crucial in keeping the hospital open and in providing education for the Negro children.